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Sihanouk's 'Absurdity' Serves Cambodia Well

By Warren Unna
Staff Reporter

Who is this "crazy" Cambodian Prince who is making motions to model his country after Communist China and kicking out a \$28.4 million a year American aid program?

To many observers, Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's 41-year-old chief of state, political boss and government theoretician is crazy like a fox.

When Sihanouk was a youthful heir to two royal lines, the French pulled him out of a school in Saigon to turn him into what they thought would be an amenable King.

But when the French refused to treat him like a King and to grant Cambodia its independence, Sihanouk publicly exiled himself to neighboring Thailand and embarrassed the French into action.

When the Great Powers got together in Geneva in 1954 to horse trade on the French Indo-China peace settlement, Britain's Anthony Eden and France's Pierre Mendes-France instructed Sihanouk's representative, Cambodia's current Ambas-



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sador to the U.S. Nong Kimny, to give in to the Soviet Union's demand for a two-part, Communist and anti-Communist Cambodia.

Sihanouk's representative refused. The Soviet's V. M. Molotov surprisingly gave in and Cambodia, a Utah-sized Southeast Asian country of six million, became the one unit of the old French Indo-China to emerge from the peace treaty unscathed.

Later when Sihanouk found the crown too cumbersome for a working ruler, he handed it over to his father.

And when he found his ministers and government bureaucrats too grand to want to work with their hands he stripped to shorts and a T-shirt, holstered a pick and shovel and made it mandatory for public officials to devote 15 days out of each year to building irrigation dams and road works.

When I revisited Cambodia in May after a four-year absence I found great economic and social progress. Schools and hospitals were mushrooming; factories were diversifying Cambodia's production to give her the exports needed for buying badly-needed machinery.

Sihanoukville, Cambodia's first real ocean port on the Gulf of Thailand, had all the carefully-planned development to become Asia's most modern city.

But while Sihanouk bustles into every village of his country churning his "children" into action, he has been bustling around the world outside with some fairly infuriat-

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ing statements, particularly toward the West.

As one highly placed Cambodian put it, "The Prince realizes that if he did not say things in a large voice nobody would pay any attention to the problems of little Cambodia."

The Prince, who prefers to be called by the feudal French title of "Monseigneur," is so conscious of giving his underdeveloped country a royal dignity he even personally supervises menus, guest lists and accommodations for state visitors. He is under no illusion about the place of Kings and Princes in Communist China—despite the red-carpet reception Peking always grants him.

But, based on four interviews, I am convinced Sihanouk is a realist.

He thinks Communist China is the wave of the future for Southeast Asia. He does not think a far-off United States either will want to or be of much good when the chips are down. He

considers that the United States Central Intelligence Agency tried to topple him four years ago and suspects that the CIA has just had a

hand in toppling his unlamented neighbor, South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem.

From Washington's stand-

ards and perspectives, Sihanouk may be acting absurdly today. But the Prince, who has acted so "absurdly" so many times in the past,

undoubtedly thinks he now is acting in the only way possible to preserve a small and otherwise unnoticed country.